Akuyaku Tensei Dakedo Doushite Kou Natta.

(悪役転生だけどどうしてこうなった。)

Arc 01

Part 04

Sekimura Imuya
(関村イムヤ)

Story Description:

Eliza Kaldia, who reincarnated as a noble girl villainess in a fantasy otome game, was stuck in a world that seemed far from her image of how noble girls should be living, as the fated events of the game were still far off while she remained a child. In the first place, it was suspect if she could even live to make it to the school setting of the game. Due to changes in the situation of the neighboring country which never appeared in the original game, the world became nothing like the flowery school life from the game. It was a world where even young girls had to take up weapons. How did it turn out this way...

I don't have any cheat-like abilities. I can't use magic. My sense of ethics might have become a little twisted due to being reincarnated.

Original Story can be found here: Link

Chapter 57: The Same Name (Part 1)

(Translator notes: For anyone that missed it, turns out Ratoka is a guy that's being forced to act as a girl by Eliza when in the mansion. Also, as a recap for anyone who's forgotten some characters, Ratoka is the villager kid that threw a rock at Eliza and subsequently got arrested. Eliza faked his execution, and kept him as a potential body double because he looks similar to her, saying that their shared eye color, red, is very rare and impossible to fake, and created a fake identity, "Elise Cherstoka," for him to act as in order to spread misinformation and confuse any potential future enemies. This fake name is purposefully similar to another girl currently living at Eliza's mansion, Elise Sherstok, who is a noble girl with a sickly body that's currently recovering at the Kaldia mansion, since the Kaldia domain has a climate that's well suited for her illness. Hopefully this summary helps anyone who's forgotten the details, as these two characters haven't appeared for quite a while. The next 10+ chapters will be told from Ratoka's point of view, and it's actually narrated in third person instead of first person, so hopefully I do a good job, as it's my first time tackling the third person perspective.)

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……Ratoka smelled the faint scent of flowers, and opened his eyes.

He still couldn't get used to the feeling of these clothes against his body. He missed the familiar scent of straw, and he laid and rolled on the bed a bit before getting up.

Since it's not his usual wooden bed, but covered fully with soft cloths instead, it's very uncomfortable for him. Well, due to that, he's been getting up earlier than before, that might be the only good thing about it.

Then, he sighed deeply. There was a single flower placed by the pillow, giving his entire room a sweet smell.

This room is narrow and made of solid stone walls, and the loud snores of people in the connecting rooms echo loudly in his room as well. He pushed away the wooden board covering the window, and let the faint

sunlight shine in.

It's a little before dawn.

As the moon and sun changed places, the reddish tinged sunrise that only lasted for a short time each morning was the most beautiful time of day, is what he thought.

He kept watching the sky until it turned completely blue. His mind which was still groggy until then, finally began functioning.

When he remembered the face of the person that had taught him the beauty of sunrises, he felt a pain in his chest. She was a sister in training from the church that had been out on patrol. He only knew her for a short time, but, that's exactly why he remembered her eye color, as clear blue as the sky, so clearly.

It was almost time to get up, so he turned away from the window, got out of bed, and knocked on the wood and iron knocker installed in the middle of the barracks. The loud knocking finally interrupted that annoying snoring, and hauled the sordid men out of their dreams.

"It's morning, get up, you middle-aged men."

"……Oh, ohh. Morn'in, Ratoka."

"All of you, would never wake up at all if I went easy on you, every morning……"

He's already been here for two weeks. Whoever wakes up first in the morning is supposed to wake everyone else up with the knocker, but ever since he's come here, he's been the only person that's ever woke everyone else up.

This morning as well, the adult soldiers blew him away, and after falling down ten times, Ratoka reached his physical limits.

Although this always happened, the uncouth soldiers would always stick around watching him, ridiculing him and laughing at him every time his sword got knocked out of his hand. Even more humiliating, today the soldiers didn't even give him time to catch his breath as they hooted

at him.

The jeers today were,

“Oi oi, how pathetic! Even Charlie was better than this when she was five years old!”

“If you can’t even beat a five year old little girl, all you’re gonna be good for is harvesting wheat!”

“That’s why, young master Ratoka is an ‘ojou-san,’ I say!”

That’s what was being said.

Ratoka had been forced to the barracks by the earl, and the earl had told the soldiers to “give Ratoka the same training that Viscountess Kaldia went through,” so of course the soldiers would compare him to that girl at everything, and since Ratoka wasn’t as good as her, everyone called him “ojou-san.”

Ratoka already had a complex about his rather girlish looking face, so calling him an “ojou-san,” meaning lady, only increased his humiliation.

“Shut up! I’m not the same as that Charlie bastard, this is my first time learning swordsmanship!!”

Ratoka was so irritated that he shouted out at the soldiers, and they fell silent for a moment. Just as Ratoka finally thought he would get some quiet, the soldiers started laughing even louder than before.

“Charlie you say, hahaha, she’s never even touched a sword before she came here to train with us!”

At that retort, even Ratoka was unable to find a comeback. “Damn you all!!” He couldn’t find anything to say, so all he could do was curse at everyone in foul language.

Nobles learn the sword starting from a young age. The young sister that had stayed in Cyril village several years ago had definitely said that to him.

At first, he had thought that he should go through with and endure this sword training, but now he can’t take all the jeering anymore. Now that

he's discovered his skill level, his already battered pride is in shreds.

More than anything else, he hates the person he's being compared to. This girl they're calling Charlie, the daughter of the noble Ratoka hates more than anything – or more accurately speaking, the current domain lord.

Seeing Ratoka's face distort as he was unable to even express his anger and frustration properly, even the soldiers realized that they may have gone a little overboard, and they stopped laughing. That laughter that was so annoying had finally stopped, and it's quiet now, but Ratoka was too angry to care anymore.

"-Well, um, what is it. You shouldn't hate our lord so much."

Someone among the soldiers mumbled that, and some of the other soldiers also mumbled in agreement, and they scattered, as the atmosphere had gotten cooler.

"-What is all this!!"

Ratoka made a fist with his right hand and hit the ground in frustration, then he heard a voice colder than any he'd ever heard before.

"You wake up so early, you damned brat. If you're still that energetic, why don't you practice some more with me for another five rounds?"

At the same moment, Ratoka's wooden sword that had been knocked out of his hand came flying down again and hit his stomach, causing him to moan.

Even though he was only eight years old, Ratoka recklessly glared at his opponent Gunther. Gunther who had his foot on top of Ratoka's head as he laid down on the ground, defeated, returned a sharp gaze back at him.

"……Sorry."

Although Ratoka reluctantly apologized, Gunther's gaze didn't change at all. Gunther finally pulled his leg back a bit, and Ratoka hurriedly jumped up and retrieved his sword.

He felt like Gunther was about to kick him, and he was right.

Ratoka barely managed to dodge Gunther's foot by a hair's breadth, and Gunther tut tutted.

"Come on, don't laze around, let's start already!"

"Yes, Gunther-sensei."

Ratoka nodded, and Gunther started attacking him again.

.....It only took two attacks, before Ratoka was knocked over on the ground again.

In the afternoon, he has to go forage for his own dinner. That's the rule of this domain's army.

His physical strength was pushed to its limits to the point where he was throwing up, so of course it was impossible for him to do any hunting in his state of extreme fatigue. At least, that's what Ratoka thought.

He's used to feeling hungry anyways. Sulking and telling himself that he was doing it out of defiance, Ratoka had never once gone out to forage for dinner.

Instead –

"Ah, you've come today as well?" (Elise) (Translator note: going to use parentheses to show who is speaking for this section to reduce confusion, as Ratoka goes by 'Elise' as well when in the mansion.)

Still caring about what others thought of him... he basically dragged his body through the shadows, as he glared at Eliza's mansion, a symbol of the former domain lord he hated so much. Then, from a section of the garden's complicated layout, he heard a soft voice from a window above him.

"Elise-sama!" (Ratoka)

When Ratoka looked up, he saw a girl meet his eyes, perched with her elbows on the windowsill from her room on the second floor. She looked delighted to see him, and laughed happily and elegantly.

"Hehehe..... How funny. You're also 'Elise-sama,' aren't you?" (Elise)

Although he still felt slightly bitter at being called that, he swallowed it down and smiled back at the girl. More importantly to Ratoka, he's happy that Elise seems healthy and energetic again today.

"Elise-sama, what shall we talk about today?" (Elise)

"Anything. ……But anyways, Elise-sama, I…… when you address me, you really don't have to add -sama." (Ratoka)

Ratoka mumbled a bit, and finally uttered a tiny wish of his. Although he comes here and says that every time, Elise would always smile happily and say "sorry," but she never once nodded and agreed to his request.

Well, his true wish is to actually have Elise call him by his real name, "Ratoka," but he's strictly forbidden from telling Elise his real name.

That's why, at the very least, he hoped that Elise could address him more familiarly.

Talking with a noble girl, he's scared to ask her for anything more than that – and he's also confused, because Elise doesn't fit his mental image of how a "noble" should be at all.

He's always believed that nobles were arrogant spendthrifts that never thought about commoners at all, that didn't know how to do anything other than look pretty and make idle chatter. Although it was just the sister in training that had told him that, he's never heard anything else about nobles, nor does he want to hear.

Unfortunately, the now former lord of this domain, was even worse than the nobles she talked about, is what he had thought.

However, Elise who always smiled gently at him, he couldn't think of her as a typical noble at all.

He felt himself idolizing Elise, believing her to be special, and Ratoka viewed her as sacred.

However, the difference between nobles has him even more irritated. Every single day, when he's in the barracks, he has to hear her name over and over again, that name he associates with everything bad about

nobles, – the girl that the soldiers also call Charlie, Eliza. He hates everything about her, that damned Kaldia daughter.

What's "Charlie" even supposed to mean, Ratoka had asked the soldiers this morning.

Charlie. A name passed down in the ancient language of the Jugfena region. From even before St. Ahar created the Ar Xia Kingdom a millenium ago, he's now a story told at bedtime about a legendary king that had ruled over the entire Jugfena region.

What's "Charlie" supposed to be.

While he smiled at Elise, once again in the back of his mind, Ratoka spat at Eliza.

Chapter 58: The Same Name (Part 2)

(More translator notes: so starting this chapter we get to see what the new arc is likely going to be about. I'd like to point out that I have now romanized Shiriru village into Cyril village, partly because to reduce confusion with the similarly named Shiru tribe and partly because I played Grandia II and there's a place called Cyril in that game. Just mentioning in case anyone is confused/lost as to where Cyril village is. And as a reminder, it's also where Ratoka's from.)

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Ratoka has been in the barracks for a month and a half now, and he's gained enough strength to the point where he isn't throwing up anymore.

However, he's still not foraging for his own dinner at night, he's still going every day without eating any dinner.

Today, his marching distance training was increased in length. Still, he's expected to remain standing and finish all of it. His feet hurt so badly after it all, that Ratoka didn't even visit Elise, and just crawled straight into his bed after training.

Speaking of hunting for food – he remembered the noble girl that recently became Eliza's new bodyguard and companion. She's a blond girl that Ratoka often sees hanging around the barracks after his training is over, twirling her spear.

She's more skilled than anyone in the army with the spear, and she makes it look freakishly easy to catch large animals when going out hunting. Because of this, the number of soldiers that call Ratoka "ojou-san" have decreased.

As Ratoka observed her behavior every day, he found that she didn't fit the image he had of a "noble" at all, either.

"All noble girls, they want to wear a brand new dress every day……" Ratoka heard the sister's nostalgic voice in the back of his mind. Even though he hasn't heard that voice in two years, he still remembers it

clearly – rather, he can't forget it.

Four years ago, when the former domain lord died, the Kaldia citizens' lives slowly began returning to normal.

Two years ago, it was right after the adults had finished planting rye in spring. During a time when nobody had enough excess yet to be able to care about others' plights, suddenly a traveling group of sisters visited Cyril village.

Of course, Cyril village wasn't able to welcome the sisters due to its hardships. However, the sisters did not show any dissatisfactions towards the villagers, and remained calm while helping the villagers in their tasks, as their main goal was to travel from village to village while spreading a certain "story."

– That all the nobles, had forgotten the original work that nobles are supposed to perform. That the nobles were only abusing their authority, and enjoying luxurious lives. That what the nobles were doing was against the teachings of the church.

One young girl from among the sisters kept telling Ratoka this "story" over and over again.

While telling their "stories" about the nobles, the sisters would keep talking about the arrogance and extravagance of the nobles they've seen in their travels, and for the people of Cyril village that lived like they were in hell on earth under the former domain lord's rule, of course they would believe it all. There was nobody that didn't believe the sisters.

As a result, even now, the Cyril villagers have put their blind faith in this group of sisters. This includes Ratoka, who understood less than half of their story. Even so, it could be said that he's the one who believes in them the most of all.

Ratoka still vividly remembers the young sister in training that talked to him. Everything that the girl told him about nobles, he believes as fact about all nobles.

Because of his blind faith, that's how Ratoka used to view nobles.

At that time, Ratoka's body was filled with injuries every day, as he spent daylight begging every day, and sleeping in the shadows of people's houses at night.

If he went home, he didn't know what would happen.

His mother had fallen mentally ill, and didn't recognize Ratoka anymore.

Ratoka had black hair just like the domain lord, and red eyes just like the domain lord. The similarity was too much and his mother lost her mind. In her confusion, she couldn't even bear to look at Ratoka. Because of this, she lived in terrible fear of Ratoka.

Ratoka was always alone in Cyril village. The other villagers all avoided him. To Ratoka, he didn't know why his mom and the villagers hated and feared him so much.

Ratoka doesn't have a father. His mother had gotten pregnant with Ratoka when she was forced into sex service as a "laborer" by the previous domain lord.

When her belly had gotten too big to do anything else and she was returned to her hometown village, Ratoka's mother had already lost her sanity. She didn't know where she was anymore, or who the father of her child was.

Also, there was a rule from the previous domain lord that any boys that "laborers" gave birth to would be killed. If this wasn't done, the domain lord said he would have the entire village killed.

While the "laborers" was forced into sex service all over the place, the only common point was that they all served the nobility. – Meaning, any children they had would probably be the scions of nobility. Girls were fine, but boys weren't allowed to be born.

So with fear of the punishment hanging over their heads, the villagers would be forced to make her give up her newborn child, if it was a boy.

However, Ratoka's mother was already out of her mind. Without even calling for a midwife, she gave birth alone.

She ended up giving birth to twins. The girl had died in childbirth, but the boy was still living.

Ratoka's mother was hugging the baby girl's dead body when she was discovered. And so, the villagers concealed the information about Ratoka's birth from the domain lord. He led a discrete life in a small, run-down house with his mother until news of the domain lord's death finally reached Cyril village five years ago.

"Ratoka" is actually a girl's name, probably meant for his deceased twin sister. Ratoka's mother never did prepare a boy's name for her son.

After news of the domain lord's death reached her, Ratoka's mother got even worse mentally.

Ratoka was no longer able to withstand the way his mother always abused him, so that's why he escaped outside of his home.

Then, he became more well-known in the village.

Although the villagers had decided not to kill him as the domain lord would have wanted, just the circumstances of his birth alone made the villagers want to avoid him.

Although his mother temporarily got better again for two years, she finally relapsed again. She had gone so insane to the point where she no longer recognized her son that everyone had taken great care to help her hide and bring up.

Ratoka would just wander around the outskirts of the village every day and look at the ground listlessly. And while walking, Ratoka would think about how haggard and hungry he was getting. His mother, who had once been his entire world to him, was now trying to harm him.

"-Why are you walking with your head down like that? You should watch where you're going, or it could be dangerous, you know."

The first time when he heard that clear and energetic voice, Ratoka didn't think that she was talking to him.

When outside his home, he felt like he was just a ghost to everyone. At

that point in time, he wanted to interact with someone else more than anything at all.

"-Hey, are you alright?"

Someone tapped him on the shoulder, and he was so surprised when he turned around that his heart almost suddenly stopped. A girl that was only slightly taller than he was, was looking straight at him with eyes the color of the dawn sky.

Ratoka opened his eyes that resembled the color of fire.

The light coming in from the window woke Ratoka up out of his light sleep instantly. When he opened his eyes, he found that his room was being dyed a vermillion scarlet by the setting sun.

.....He must have fallen asleep right after the day's training.

He tried to work his mind that didn't seem to want to wake up quite yet. He felt like he had just went to bed, so he must have fallen asleep. His body does feel a little lighter now, so he turned his back to the sunset.

Outside his room, in the cafeteria's direction, he could hear the commotion of soldiers having fun chatting.

With the muffled sounds coming through the walls, and thinking about the relationships that others have with him, Ratoka bit his lip in frustration.

He loves the dawn sunrise, and hates evening sunsets.

Maybe it's also because that he's not with everyone else, while listening to others have fun through the wall, that he would recall such a lonely memory.

Whenever he returned home to his insane mother's run-down house, he would always have a mix of emotions that felt like muddy sludge in him, as he walked back slowly. Whenever he heard lively sounds from other houses of people having fun, even that was quite a blow to Ratoka's weak spirit back then.

Even if he calls for his mother she wouldn't even look at him, Ratoka

felt so jealous of others, sad, and mentally exhausted.

Anyone is fine, talk to me about anything, see me, make me feel like I exist – that's what Ratoka desired back then, as soon as possible.

And so, the first person to grant his wish, and would talk to him about various things on the nobility, was the young sister in training with reddish blue eyes the color of the dawn sky. For that reason, that's why Ratoka believed in her blindly.

Ratoka sighed deeply in an attempt to drive away his loneliness and old memories, and Ratoka looked up at the wall that was lit up by the setting sun.

Dusk in the Kaldia domain lasts for only a short time. The vermillion scarlet that dyed the room earlier, was getting imperceptibly darker and darker.

Rather than the color of the girl with eyes the color of the dawn sky, this color reminds him more of the red eyes of that daughter of the domain lord. And, her dead father, the former domain lord.

Suddenly, he wondered about the color of his own eyes. Red eyes are extremely rare, and his eye color is the exact same shade as Eliza's.

Chapter 59: The Same Name (Part 3)

(Translator note: Since Igor, a soldier that died in the battle at Fort Jugfena, appears in this chapter, this means that these chapters take place before the battle in the story's timeline. Ratoka was mentioned before as having been sent off to the army for training, after all. Rest in peace, Igor, we hardly knew you..... Also, on the topic of arcs, I took a look ahead, and the school arc finally begins, in Chapter 143. Just for the curious that were wondering if a school arc would ever happen in this story.)

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"Oi, you're up?"

A voice suddenly spoke up from the half-open door to Ratoka's room, catching his attention instantly. Turning to look, he saw a sturdy-looking middle-aged man walk into his room.

He's also tall and on the thin side, and probably gives off the impression of being too weak to be a soldier, but he's the longest serving member of the Kaldia army, that all the other soldiers look up to and go for advice.

The soldier crinkled his crow's feet wrinkles slightly at Ratoka. The light of the red sunset shone on him and he cast only a dim shadow.

"Good, since I was about to come wake you up. Claudia-sama hunted some monster meat today. Right now, everyone's cooking it up. You should come have some as well, that's why I'm here to wake you up," the soldier invited Ratoka to eat. While still remaining on his bed, Ratoka just looked at him blankly.

What exactly was the soldier saying, Ratoka didn't understand. Although he understands each word individually, but he didn't understand them together as a whole.

".....What's the matter? Are you not feeling well?"

He started worrying about how Ratoka was doing, and walked next to Ratoka's bed. When the soldier reached out his hand with a worried look

on his face, Ratoka shook his head hurriedly.

"That's, not it....."

The soldier watched Ratoka's confusion for a few seconds. Then, he smiled softly.

He suddenly picked Ratoka up in his arms, and started walking with him without saying anything. Ratoka didn't say anything either. He was so frozen up in surprise at what was going on, that his voice wouldn't come out.

"I'll bring you over."

The soldier carried Ratoka to the cafeteria, where almost all the other soldiers were currently gathered. The barracks cafeteria was constructed with plenty of room, enough to hold one hundred people, but seemed slightly empty since there weren't enough soldiers in the barracks to fill the cafeteria up.

"Oi, as expected of the old man!"

"Oh my, wow, to carry the ojou-san here in your arms, this must be the wisdom of age."

"Hey, you shouldn't tease children like that. If you keep treating him like that you don't know what could happen, he might do something stupid!"

While being carried like this, Ratoka heard all kinds of comments coming from around him, until a calm voice admonished the soldiers.

– Since he was so embarrassed, and couldn't deal with it, Ratoka hid his face in the shoulders of the soldier carrying him.

The soldier patted Ratoka in order to soothe him.

All Ratoka could think about was that the soldiers would surely ridicule him for the state he's in now. What will they say about him. They'll probably say he's just a small kid?

However, contrary to his expectations, the soldiers didn't make fun of him, and remained silent. Ratoka had definitely thought they would all

laugh coarsely at him, and seeing all the soldiers so quiet like this shocked him.

He lifted his head slightly, and took a look at the soldiers. Just then, someone offered him a skewer of cooked monster meat, and he couldn't help but blink.

"This is for you."

The young soldier holding the meat out to Ratoka was averting his eyes, and Ratoka hesitantly finally took the meat on the skewer that was being offered to him. It's also a bigger piece of meat than what any of the other soldiers have, which made Ratoka even more puzzled as to why he was the one getting it.

"There's no mistake, this is for you, hurry up and eat it. Since you haven't been eating dinner, right?"

Since Ratoka held the skewer for too long without eating even though his stomach was growling, the young soldier got impatient with him. Reflexively, Ratoka couldn't help but hold up the skewer like a weapon. The young soldier immediately jumped away from him.

"Man, there's really no helping some people."

While watching their exchange, the middle-aged soldier holding on to Ratoka smiled wryly.

"Honestly. All of you, making such a big fuss over one brat."

Hearing such words coming from close to him, Ratoka was getting more and more shocked. When he looked in the opposite direction, it was Gunther who just made that comment. Looking at him, Gunther had his usual scowl and was furrowing his eyebrows like usual.

"Ahh, Gunther's dirty mouth hasn't improved at all since he was teaching Charlie."

"Rather than improvement, I think it could be getting worse. Charlie wouldn't give up no matter how much she was ridiculed, this brat's not like that at all."

Ratoka realized that the two adult soldiers were talking about him, and he hid his face. However, was the domain lord's daughter also ridiculed by the soldiers like this during her training, he was somewhat surprised inside.

Even though the ugly feeling of hatred would always appear every time he thought about her, this time he felt an entirely different type of emotion swirling about inside him like mist.

That was what surprised Ratoka the most so far that day.

That mist-like feeling, didn't disappear from Ratoka's mind that day, but rather kept increasing inside him. He still hates the former domain lord's daughter. However, he's also beginning to feel a mystery feeling towards her now that keeps increasing in strength.

Also, the slight murderous intent he used to have towards Eliza was fading. Ratoka didn't understand what was happening with his own feelings.

Ever since Ratoka had monster meat together with everyone, the soldiers began saying positive things about Ratoka as well. It's because it was the oldest veteran soldier that everyone respects had taken Ratoka out of his room to eat with all the soldiers. After the veteran soldier admonished everyone else, the soldiers' treatment of Ratoka had indeed gotten much better.

In the first place, the soldiers couldn't help but keep comparing Ratoka to Eliza, mostly because they didn't understand that Eliza was actually much more mature for her age and smarter than any normal child. So when Earl Terejia had Ratoka put into the barracks and told the soldiers to train him as well, of course they would treat him the same way, none of them knowing any other children.

So even though the soldiers were clumsy and inexperienced with children, although they had treated Ratoka the same as Eliza up until now, they were learning that the two of them should be treated differently, which caused a rapid change in the soldiers' actions and words that greatly confused Ratoka.

It started from little things. Just greetings between the soldiers and Ratoka, even though everyone still acted nervous around each other at first.

Ratoka remained in a state of perpetual confusion at all the changes around him. Each time he exchanged greetings with the soldiers though, his irritation towards them seemed to disappear bit by bit.

It started with breakfast. The young soldiers sitting close to him in the cafeteria would make conversation with Ratoka. And, apart from Gunther still insulting him, the soldiers would begin giving him words of encouragement. They would complain about the former domain lord together, grumble about the severity of everyone's training menu, tell stories about everyone's hometowns and families, Ratoka gradually got to know the soldiers better.

There were quite a lot of shocking stories that the soldiers had to tell.

For example, a lot of them were former bandits, that hated the former domain lord just as much as Ratoka did. Since Ratoka couldn't comprehend why they didn't hate the domain lord's daughter Eliza as well, he couldn't sleep well at all on the night he first learned this.

He heard all about how the soldiers had treated Eliza pretty terribly as well when she first entered the barracks. Ratoka learned that in fact, the toll it took on her body from Gunther's training seems to have been even worse than what Ratoka received, and the insults were just as bad as well.

"Oh, you're here. Ratoka~"

After marching training, Ratoka was sitting down resting in the shade of a tree, when he heard someone calling his name.

"Paulo."

"That was pretty tiring. You alright?"

A boy with fluffy, wavy blonde hair sat down next to Ratoka. His name's Paulo, and he's the second youngest member of the Kaldia army, older than Ratoka by only a few years.

Maybe it's because they're the closest in age, Ratoka talks the most with Paulo. Or rather, it could be said that Paulo's extremely outgoing. This is actually the first time that they've talked during a break though, but Paulo's relaxed attitude like this was just natural made Ratoka forget that fact and his self-consciousness.

"I'm fine……"

Although he is tired from the training, he's sitting down here more to get away from the heat. Since it's the middle of summer right now, this is the hottest time of year in the Kaldia domain.

When Paulo who was worried about Ratoka heard him complain about the heat, Paulo raised his eyebrows slightly. It seems that Paulo's really strong against the heat, and even after the training was over, he thought nothing of it.

"I see. Then, want to grab lunch together with me?"

"Mmm…… I want to cool off here a little bit longer."

The sunlight coming down was so dazzling, that he was hesitant about stepping out from the shade. Ratoka's skin is rather white and sensitive to heat, so he's not good at dealing with it, so he'd rather relax in the tree's shade compared to eating lunch. In the first place, he doesn't feel hungry right now.

"Oi you, you alright?"

Another two people showed up, this time it was the oldest soldier in the army along with one of the younger soldiers walking unsteadily.

"Calvin-san, Igor-san."

Although Ratoka felt it was too bothersome to even open his mouth, Paulo greeted both of them for him. The soldier named Calvin is the one that held on to Ratoka and brought him out to the cafeteria that one time. The one trudging along slowly behind him is Igor, a young soldier who is Ratoka's roommate now. They both smiled happily as they entered the shade, and held out some large cups to Ratoka and Paulo.

“Make sure you guys stay hydrated.”

Ratoka silently took the cup of water.

Paulo and Calvin are the two soldiers that Ratoka is the friendliest with now. It’s mostly because of age for Paulo, and because Calvin brought Ratoka out of his room to the cafeteria and defended him that one time. Well, Ratoka’s roommate Igor has been looking after him as well.

Ratoka gulped down his water. He definitely feels a lot better now after drinking it.

“Thank you very much.”

Ratoka lowered his head to thank the two people standing in front of him. Then, Igor reached a hand out to pull Ratoka off the ground.

“……If we don’t go soon, they’ll stop serving lunch at the cafeteria.”

Ratoka was almost about to reflexively say that he doesn’t feel hungry right now, but he stopped himself from saying anything. He definitely would have said that in irritation last month, but why weren’t those words leaving his mouth right now, he wondered.

He looked at Paulo who was still standing in the shade. Even though Ratoka had said before that he didn’t feel hungry and to leave him alone, Paulo still insisted on having lunch together.

Before, he probably would have just stayed here in the shade alone. After all, if he went to get lunch, he would just have to suffer through insults like “if you can’t move, want me to carry you?”

For Ratoka, who had always wanted to interact with others, having to live together with others in the barracks and get along with everyone was slowly beginning to heal his spirit, and return him back to normal.

Now that he’s actually being treated as a child of his age, he’s no longer taking things out on others, and the heavy feelings of hatred he had toward Eliza were beginning to fade.

Chapter 60: The Same Name (Part 4)

(Note for all of you that come here via novelupdates and miss my other posts, I've updated the cast of characters. The author has also updated characters' ages, so now we know that Eliza is 6, Claudia is 16 instead of 10 since I mistranslated her saying she was 10 years older as she was 10 years old in her introduction chapter, that Kamil is 12-15, that Earl Terejia is 73, Gunther is 26, Ratoka is 8, and Elise is 9. There's also quite a lot of unintroduced characters on the character list again, which provides hints as to where the story's potentially heading next. Seems like it could be politics and romance based.)

*

Since the summer heat is getting milder now in the evening and Ratoka didn't eat too much at lunch since he wasn't hungry, Ratoka wondered if he should give hunting a try for once.

He has no hunting or gathering experience at all. He feels that if he tries his best he should at least be able to get something, and although his thinking is rather shortsighted, for the first time ever, at any rate this afternoon Ratoka is about to go foraging.

"Ratoka, what are these?"

"This should be fine to eat if it's cooked over a fire. ……Ah, this red plant, I'm going to dig it up. Only its roots are edible."

In the forest belonging to the area under direct control, Ratoka was carefully gathering plants.

Since other soldiers also gather plants on a regular basis, the army has quite a lot of knowledge on what plants are edible in this domain. The Kaldia domain also has some plants unique to it that can't be found anywhere else.

By the way, Ratoka chose to gather plants for his first food collecting expedition. Since the army didn't want to let him go by himself, for Ratoka's safety Paulo was accompanying him, and they've entered the

forest together for Ratoka to gather plants. Although Paulo did try to stop him, Ratoka paid him no attention as he'd already made up his mind.

That's because there's some plants that only Ratoka knows as well.

The sister in training that Ratoka knew for only a short time while she was staying in Cyril village, had taught Ratoka more than just about the nobility. Since Ratoka's mother wasn't working, Ratoka was always going hungry, so the young sister had taught Ratoka about various wild plants.

Which leaves and fruits are inedible, which plants are poisonous, which seeds can be eaten and which can't, there's quite a lot of types of plants in Kaldia that are inedible.

Knowledge of wild plants has been passed down over the generations by the sisters, as they've traveled through all the many different parts of Arxia, and they must know how to find their own food as many places are too poor to provide additional food for the sisters.

"Ratoka, what are these?"

"……I don't know. The ones I don't recognize, it's probably better not to touch them."

"Got it. ……I don't gather plants too often myself."

Paulo had been holding out some type of five-leaved plant to Ratoka, a plant he's never seen before. Well, Ratoka only learned eight different types of plants from the sister in training, so he's actually not that knowledgeable about plants overall.

Although Paulo learned the poisonous plants since the army hammered that knowledge into him, he doesn't know the rest of them too well. Ratoka didn't have any detailed instructions given to him or knowledge on how to gather plants either, and on top of all that Paulo has to check Ratoka's plants to make sure they're not poisonous, so this has all been very time consuming.

"Well, that's how it is. ……Let's go hunting tomorrow, instead of gathering plants."

Ratoka's plant gathering with Paulo's assistance had rather low efficiency. He understands that as well, but rather than saying it out loud, he could only softly offer an alternative. Paulo just nodded and smiled wryly at Ratoka's words. Paulo also understood what Ratoka didn't dare to say out loud.

After they finally gathered a decent amount, Ratoka and Paulo returned to the barracks as fast as they could. Since Ratoka's not used to foraging, the heat's still making him more tired than usual and he's barely able to move. They sat down in a corner of the cafeteria, and drank down some water for their parched throats while dealing with the plants they gathered.

As he silently removed roots, stems, or flowers and other such inedible parts from the plants he picked, or performed other chores like hollowing the seeds out from the fruits, Ratoka was reminded of Elise.

Come to think of it, he hasn't been visiting that gentle girl recently due to the summer heat. His training has been increased to the point where he no longer has any extra strength to spare, on top of all this unending summer heat, he always goes straight back to the barracks after training to rest now.

Now that he thinks on it, it was really sudden that he stopped visiting her. He didn't tell her beforehand that his training was going to get busier, and the temperature has gotten higher as well, so Ratoka hasn't been visiting Elise at all.

Since Ratoka hasn't shown his face there for a while, he wondered what she thought. Since it's Elise, she's probably worried about him. Maybe she'll think that something happened to him.

At the same time that he worried about what she would think, there was also some anxiety swirling about inside him.

What if, she didn't care about him at all. Ratoka's hand that was busy dealing with the plants suddenly stopped.

Whenever he visited, Elise would smile and laugh happily with him. She would look him in the eyes, tell silly stories, and they would laugh

together.

He'd always been alone in the village, and until Ratoka's time in the barracks, Elise and Eliza were the only people to have ever looked him in the eyes.

When he'd just come to the barracks, since the soldiers were endlessly insulting him, Ratoka would always avoid looking at them.

He decided to go and visit Elise. Some of the seeds he just peeled, he'll take some over to her as a present too. Since he hasn't been to see Elise for so long, he needs to make up for it somehow.

He's really scared of Elise coming to dislike him.

He picked some seeds that had a slightly sweet taste to them, they're the best tasting ones from among the plants that Ratoka knows.

If Elise happens to like them, if she's happy, then maybe she'll come to like him more. While thinking such things, Ratoka carefully pared the next fruit.

Meeting someone's eyes normally, and having a nice conversation with them. It's something that he's never experienced before, something he's always wanted but was so far out of his reach, being all alone by himself with no one to talk to, he never wants to be like that again. Even listening to insults, although not pleasant, is slightly better.

Those were Ratoka's desires from the bottom of his heart. He doesn't even think life in the barracks is that bad now, because nobody from the soldiers tries to avoid or ignore Ratoka.

Why is it then that, even though Elise is always agreeable and nice to him, why is he so worried about going to see her.

Ratoka's hand stopped again. He wondered again why he was so worried. He tried relaxing himself, in search of the answer.

– If possible, he wants someone to think about him. Since his mother's no longer sane, she doesn't even recognize him anymore. He wants something else in exchange. Anyone is fine. He wants to be the most

important person to someone, although he doesn't want to say that out loud.

He just wants someone to worry about him.

……He clarified his own wish to himself, realizing just how much he wanted it, and immediately after, Eliza's icy expression came to mind for some reason, with unknown feelings that clogged his throat.

Just what does she intend to do with him.

Eliza stole Ratoka's freedom and name from him. He has to go by a fake name at her mansion, and she basically forced him into the barracks as a member of her army.

Just what is going to happen to him.

Is he going to suffer a fate even worse than death?

……To him, the worst fate possible would be to cut him off from everyone, leaving him all alone.

At the very thought, he shuddered, feeling discomfort and fear all over his body.

Ratoka shook his head to clear his feelings, picked up the seeds again, and immersed himself in simple repetitive work to keep busy.

Chapter 61: The Same Name (Part 5)

The next day, Ratoka dragged his heavy feeling body even though he felt exhausted and slightly sick, and brought some of the seeds he picked yesterday with him to meet Elise.

The seeds Ratoka had were about the size of his hand, and they were pinkish in color. While they can't be eaten raw, they're really sweet and delicious if they're boiled.

Certain plants are good for recovering body strength when eaten, Ratoka remembered the sister that had taught him those words. Since Elise has a weak body, he thinks they'll be perfect for her.

While sticking to the shadows as much as possible to avoid the heat, Ratoka wondered if Elise would still be expecting him, since he hasn't visited her in so long.

However, when he arrived at the garden, he saw Elise looking down from her window with a dejected expression on her face, and his heartbeat increased rapidly.

"Elise-sama!"

He rushed towards her window and called out her name, and when Elise noticed Ratoka, her expression was one of surprise and joy.

"Elise-sama!"

The greeting he got in return was the exact same as his. Even though he used to hate it so much, maybe it's because of Elise's overjoyed expression, Ratoka didn't even mind that one bit anymore. Although it's annoying that Eliza changed his name on her own, when Ratoka thinks that it's Elise's name, he doesn't mind so much anymore.

"I'm sorry, I didn't even say anything..... and I didn't come to visit."

"No, don't worry about it. .....Since you haven't been to see me, I was worried. I wondered if something happened to you....."

Her relief at seeing him alright was evident to see, and her dazzling

smile caused Ratoka to feel a prick of guilt inside his chest. He made Elise worry about him, and that he also doubted whether Elise would worry about him, that was causing him to feel guilty, so once again he lowered his head and apologized.

Then, he held out his gift in an attempt to make himself feel better.

"Um, this. I gathered it for you."

He grasped the seeds tightly while his heart started beating faster again. Since Elise's room is on the second floor, he's going to have to toss them up to her.

What if she said she doesn't need such a thing, his heart was pounding. After all, she's still a noble. What if she doesn't like these seeds, that even most commoners don't bother looking at.

While Ratoka was waiting nervously, Elise tilted her head in confusion. Then, to the shivering Ratoka, Elise asked a question in wonder.

"Gathering? Er, what's that mean?"

It was such an unexpected response, that Ratoka's brain could no longer process what was going on.

"Ah, ……Eh?"

Ratoka could only reply in a goofy voice, and look at Elise blankly. Silence fell for a moment between them.

She had asked, what's that mean. That's what he had heard, and although Ratoka took five deep breaths, he still couldn't understand her question at all, which couldn't be helped.

Some things Ratoka would consider normal in order to survive as a child, however, normally nobles don't make food for themselves, and on top of that, Elise has always been sickly and grew up confined inside, so Elise has basically no common sense about everyday life at all.

– Suddenly, giggling could be heard from within her room. At hearing it, Ratoka's back became stiff.

When Ratoka had been put into the barracks, he'd forgotten that he

was told to not come to the mansion. Although it should seem obvious, the mansion is for nobles to live in. As a commoner, he basically shouldn't even be allowed close to here, Ratoka began to remember that fact.

That was another reason he stuck to the shadows in the first place when coming here, Ratoka just remembered. Although, there was no guarantee that someone else wouldn't be with Elise.

"What is it, Maya. Why are you laughing like that?"

"……Nothing, ojou-sama. It's just that, I'm sure that your friend Elise-sama must be very shocked. Excuse me."

While Ratoka remained completely frozen, Elise started talking again without paying it any mind. The other voice answered Elise calmly.

"Various plants and fruits are edible, and can be harvested and picked, this is called gathering. When Eliza-sama was telling you stories about her time in the barracks, surely she mentioned this as well?"

"Yes, indeed. ……So that's what gathering meant."

Because she understood, Elise smiled happily in satisfaction and turned back to Ratoka. Ratoka instantly smiled in return as well, but he knew that his cheek was still twitching.

That person in Elise's room, must have already known of Ratoka coming to visit many times already. That person must have always remained silent every time he came to visit. He wondered if she was always listening to their conversations in secret.

He had always thought that these nice, peaceful conversations belonged to him and Elise alone. And, Ratoka had also felt like there was something even sacred about it.

Ratoka was – at this moment, his cheek kept twitching, and complex emotions filled his entire head.

Elise is a noble. Surely nobles must be accustomed to having someone else listen in on their conversations, it must be natural to them.

She didn't know what the word gathering meant, and this was normal to Elise as well, meaning to her, Ratoka hasn't said or done anything bad at all.

However, she had been so different from his image of a noble. That she really is a "noble" after all, he feels like he's suddenly being confronted with that fact. An impression that still remains deep within Ratoka, of a "noble" that the sister with dawn-colored eyes despises.

"What's the matter?"

Elise was looking down at Ratoka again, tilting her head in wonder.

"-No, thing? I'm fine?"

Their standing positions relative to each other by height, seemed as if to reflect the power relationship between them as well, and Ratoka gently looked away from Elise.

Chapter 62: The Same Name (Part 6)

Since he hadn't visited Elise in so long, looking for a reason to tell her, before he realized it all Ratoka let spill that "training has gotten more difficult so I've been too busy to come," not being able to come up with anything else.

A heavy feeling, like mud, was stuck in his chest.

In Ratoka's mind, three girls kept appearing and disappearing, changing places with each other.

"Nobles are so terrible. While the villagers are in terrible condition, they live a good life, and play around happily every day." The sister with dawn-colored eyes and her faint smile was then replaced by Elise's fleeting smile which turned into her sadly shaking her head.

Then, after them, the icy expression of Eliza and her blood-red eyes, and the words she said to him from across the bars of his cell that one day, kept coming to his mind.

"A country's laws, are there to protect its people. That would include the nobility as well. The nobility aren't regular people, they're the gears that move this country. .....If foolish people forget that and try to hurt others, this country could be destroyed. Such as my father."

And so, they just kept switching and swapping, replacing each other in his mind, continuing endlessly, Ratoka's mind was going funny.

Of course, this would affect his ability to concentrate and his physical abilities.

The wooden sword in his hands was knocked away with great force, and the next thing he knew Ratoka found himself on the ground. It happened so fast, that Ratoka didn't understand what was going on until the pain in his back started setting in.

"Oi, you're not into it today."

Ratoka remained blankly stunned for a while, before his voice crawled along the ground and reached a sullen Gunther.

“It hurts.”

Gunther kicked him lightly in the head, then grabbed Ratoka by the back of his shirt and forcibly raised him off the ground.

“What are you doing!!”

“.....”

Even though Gunther was being rather rough and bellowing angrily at him, all that he got back from Ratoka was a blank look. Gunther glared at Ratoka, and Ratoka flinched.

“.....That’s enough for today.”

“Eh?”

“Just do what you like until the marching training.”

Gunther left with only those words, and quickly departed from the training grounds.

“.....What was all that.”

Ratoka’s wooden sword that was knocked out of his hands with great force, had flown farther than it ever had before.

While Paulo smeared some medicine on his back for him, Ratoka just dazedly looked at the fields. He watched the wheat swaying in the light breeze.

“What’s the matter today? You seem to be spacing out.”

“.....Mm? Ahh.....”

Ratoka barely responded to Paulo who was worried about him, and couldn’t stop himself from thinking about the three girls that were still in his mind.

Although he really wanted it all to stop and for the girls to go away, Ratoka himself did realize that it was all a manifestation of his own confusion.

The girl that had taught him his entire sense of values.

The girl most important to him right now.

And, the person he hates the most.

He didn't know who to trust or believe in, Ratoka was completely lost in confusion.

His emotions hadn't matured yet. Since he had a twisted upbringing, that distorted his emotional development. Thus, his emotional maturity is even less than average for someone his age.

Dealing with all these new thoughts and emotions, caused him great confusion.

It just went round and round inside him but he couldn't come up with any answers, so Ratoka, still with his blank expression, asked Paulo behind him.

"……Hey. Nobles are terrible people, right?"

Many of the army's soldiers had been forced into banditry because of the former domain lord, so they hate, loathe, and despise him. And, that should also extend to his wife and children. His wife had a mansion in the royal capital, and hardly ever stayed in her own domain, their children were fat and ugly, and they seemed to enjoy bullying and torturing the people in their own domain.

But, why does that not include Eliza, the only survivor.

"……What do you mean? Although the previous domain lord was indeed terrible, Earl Terejia has been helping us."

Paulo replied after thinking for a little bit.

"Claudia-sama is a really good person as well. She's nice, very fun to be around with, and not arrogant at all."

With Paulo's words, Ratoka recalled the beautiful girl with long blonde hair. He's never spoken to her, but he's seen her around many times. She's Eliza's personal attendant and bodyguard, that's all Ratoka knows. If he wasn't obedient in the barracks, maybe he would have seen her more directly.

“As for Eliza-sama..... I wonder. I would definitely hate her if she was a terrible noble like her father, but she was brought up by Earl Terejia, and I think it’s good that she does think about her people properly. Claudia-sama says that Eliza-sama is a good person, and the other soldiers all give her their recognition as well, so I think I can say she’s a good noble?”

Just as Paulo finished summing up his thoughts, he finished applying medicine on Ratoka’s back and stood up.

“Well, if you’re anxious, come to see for yourself.”

“Eh?”

Paulo said it very frankly, and Ratoka couldn’t help but think on his words. See for yourself, he said, but Eliza generally doesn’t come out from her mansion. Besides, since Paulo is also only a soldier in training, it should be almost impossible for him to get close to Eliza as well.

“Don’t worry about it, it’s nothing bad. You just have to come with us when we deploy to Fort Jugfena.”

“.....Deploy?”

It was such an unexpected word, that Ratoka could only repeat it dazedly.

Fort Jugfena would mean the country’s border.

It’s considered the most dangerous place in Arxia, bordering the unfriendly country of Densel, it’s a place where people must be prepared for death – although Ratoka actually didn’t know those things, he did somewhat understand what it meant to have to deploy troops there.

However, rather than that, more important to Ratoka right now was that Paulo would be leaving the barracks.

“-Is there going to be war?”

The words that finally came out of Ratoka, weren’t the ones he wanted to say the most. If Paulo is leaving, Ratoka wants to come along as well, but he couldn’t say it.

In the worst case scenario, Paulo might not ever return again. And so,

Ratoka couldn't bring himself to say goodbye to Paulo.

"No, I don't think it'll be to that extent. Because there's some sort of uprising in the neighboring country close to Arxia, I've heard that we're only heading over there to increase security. Our domain is going to take in some refugees, have you heard?"

Ratoka had indeed heard about the domain accepting refugees. The soldiers that had formerly captured Ratoka, were now all living together with him and had told him about the refugees.

"In our domain, because of the previous lord, there's not enough population it seems? I don't know whether Earl Terejia or Eliza-sama thought of it, but it seems that one of them decided to accept the refugees in order to help rebuild the domain and promote economic development. Having to take responsibility for that, that's probably why soldiers have to be deployed to Fort Jugfena. Maybe some other domains also wanted to accept the refugees, some domains seem to have opposed it as well, either way, our domain won't be able to sit things out."

Without them realizing it, Calvin had come up next to them holding a plate of food, and entered the conversation. He seems to have brought Ratoka and Paulo their lunch portions, and sat down next to them.

"According to Kamil, it was Eliza-sama that aggressively pushed for our domain to accept the refugees. Also, she was the one that came up with the countermeasures against the fire moths as well. That's according to the people in the mansion. If that's true, then Eliza-sama isn't like the previous lord at all."

As Calvin continued his story in an admonishing tone of voice, Ratoka only muttered "you don't know that yet." Calvin simply agreed calmly.

"That's right. I don't know what Eliza-sama will become like in the future. But right now she's definitely working for the sake of the people. .....Also, when she was here in the barracks, she tried her best with the difficult training every day. How hard this all is, you should know best, right?"

Ratoka couldn't even nod or shake his head at Calvin who was smiling

wryly at him, and could only ask him a question instead.

"Calvin..... are you also going to Fort Jugfena?"

Calvin had a blank look for a moment, then he nodded gently and smiled.

"That's right....."

The three girls had finally disappeared from Ratoka's mind, but in exchange, he had a premonition that he was going to part with the name of Ratoka and the soldiers.

He felt sadness, then a terrible sense of emptiness, Ratoka was lost for words.

Chapter 63: The Same Name (Part 7)

20 soldiers were recalled from the construction work for building a new village for the incoming refugees, while Earl Terejia's personal troops would replace them, and Eliza would lead her domain's soldiers to Fort Jugfena.

Before the soldiers returned, Ratoka was returned to the mansion. Ratoka felt a lump in his chest at having to separate from Paulo, Calvin, and the other soldiers.

Just like before, Ratoka had the room in the farthest back of the mansion, although this time he wasn't confined like last time. The chains would no longer be used on him.

When he returned, Bellway who he knew slightly immediately took him to meet two adults.

One of them was Mrs. Marshan, who was introduced to him as the current governess and who would begin giving him a proper education. The other person was a tall, slender man, who was to begin teaching him the rapier. It seems that usually they teach Eliza as well.

Although his time in the barracks had given Ratoka the foundation of what he needed for basic physical fitness, his studying and swordsmanship skills hadn't kept up.

Although he wasn't throwing up like the time right after he entered the barracks, due to Ratoka's mental fatigue and impatience with his learning not going well, combined with him wondering why he was being forced to learn all this, three weeks after he returned to the mansion, Ratoka was already sick of life there.

Unlike at the barracks, Ratoka got to sleep in a soft bed, and received three good meals a day that were prepared for him. Even so, Ratoka felt that the barracks were better.

At the very least, he was able to talk with Paulo and Calvin there every day. He was also allowed to be called Ratoka there.

Now, he's being swamped with work by the lessons given to him from his two teachers, so he barely gets to go out from his room, so he's feeling lonely and fatigued every day. It was only natural and couldn't be helped that Ratoka would feel this way.

Even so, his teachers would keep telling him "Eliza completed these lessons successfully with hard work and effort," and feeling like he was being challenged, Ratoka kept working on his lessons.

He believed what his two teachers were telling him since Calvin had also told him the same thing, that Eliza had started out knowing nothing just like she did, and that she completed everything successfully through only her own efforts. Anyways, basically Ratoka's pride did not allow him to give up on things that she was capable of doing.

Ratoka was also recognizing that nobles needed to work hard on learning many things, and he was realizing that his previous view that "nobles live a good life and play around happily every day" may have been mistaken.

That's why, Ratoka chased after Eliza. He wants to be able to do the things she can, and say "that was so simple, I didn't even need to put in any effort."

"Well then, Elise-sama, today I shall be giving a lecture on nobility and the law."

"……I'll be in your care."

At first, he was taught polite speech and etiquette, along with how to read and write words, and now he's finally being taught subject matters, one month after he returned to the mansion.

On top of the desk in front of him, Ratoka saw a rectangular object that he's never seen before, and he touched it nervously.

"Is this what's called a book?"

The rectangular object had many papers bundled inside it, filled with the characters that he had been learning, there was nothing other than the characters he was learning on the papers.

There were no blank spaces, and no matter where he looked, even though he recognized the characters, he didn't understand the meanings of the words at all. He had no idea what this book was about at all.

"Do you understand the contents?"

"……No."

"Of course. If you could read that all by yourself, there would be no need for lectures."

Mrs. Marshan always had a perfect smile on, and her eyes felt slightly soothing. Although the amount he had to learn still made him feel a little melancholy inside, Ratoka happily listened to Mrs. Marshan beginning to teach him about the book's contents.

He didn't have the free time to talk to anyone else out of classes, nor could he talk without permission even in the classroom, and he had to learn proper etiquette and language, Ratoka felt like he was almost drowning in his suffocation.

He really, really wanted to be able to meet with Elise. Her gentle, calming stories had become of central importance in Ratoka's heart.

While learning from Mrs. Marshan's lectures, his views on nobles were getting more and more shaken – especially his view on Eliza, which he had once thought impossible to change.

Arxia is a country that is ruled by law. Religion and law are inextricably intertwined in this country, it has been like this since its establishment.

"Law" is considered so important, that its administrators and executors are the nobles. Law is supposed to bring about order, leading to a healthy society and people. Nobles are those that protect the law and order, that's why "nobles" exist.

The first shrine priestess, Kusha Fema, spread the "law" that she obtained from the gods, and was the founder of modern society. Later, her descendant St. Ahar created the guardian of the law, the Ar Xia church, along with the country Arxia that lives by the church's Sacred Code of laws.

Meaning, the current Arxia Kingdom is governed by “law” above all else. And, the “country’s” administrators are the nobles.

Ratoka thought back to Eliza’s words that night again. “The nobility aren’t regular people, they’re the gears that move this country……”

Even the sister with the dawn-colored eyes had affirmed those things to him before. Although, she had said that the nobles had forgotten their duties to this country, drowning themselves in pleasure.

But, if what she said was true, why were Eliza and him still learning all these things.

The absolute views on nobles that the young sister had planted deep within Ratoka, were collapsing and loudly crumbling on itself within Ratoka, each time he had his lessons and learned more from his book.

Chapter 64: The Same Name (Part 8)

Ratoka was finally mastering the basics of the rapier.

Ratoka is a boy. As a typical young villager boy, he likes martial arts well enough.

What's more, he was even proud of himself, for being able to learn the rapier which ordinary commoners would never have the opportunity to do.

Summer was ending, so the heat and humidity were subsiding, when Ratoka heard something that made him go "why is that" involuntarily.

"Why was everything decided like this in the first place?"

The person sitting across from Ratoka, Bellway, had just told him something without an explanation like he always did.

"Your rapier training is going to end, and you're going to start learning the spear instead today. Your teacher will be Claudia-sama, you'll be learning at the training grounds, and your name with her will be Ratoka, not Elise. Also, any time that you speak with any of Earl Terejia's private troops, please call yourself Ratoka. Because I'm in charge of you, please don't give me any unnecessary trouble."

Bellway finished what he had to say, and quickly stood up and left without giving Ratoka any answers.

Even though he was allowed to use his real name for once with these people, Ratoka still felt some heavy feelings.

Why was he supposed to start learning the spear, after he had finally begun to master the rapier after all that trouble. He couldn't help but wonder about things over and over again with a heavy feeling in his heart, but couldn't come up with any answers.

In the first place, why was he even studying lessons for the nobles. Remembering that he had once thrown a stone at Eliza, Ratoka was becoming even more and more confused at her expectations for him.

She would have him executed, she said. But instead, on the day of his supposed execution, she merely had him locked up, and cut off a small lock of his hair instead.

He was provided with plain but a very ample amount of food, and was even allowed to go outside regularly. Every day, a towel to clean his body with and a hot bath was also prepared. Thanks to all this, compared to when he was in Cyril village, the skinny, grubby child that he used to be had completely disappeared, with his hair looking cleaner and healthier, his complexion looking much better, giving him a neat appearance.

If the villagers saw him now, there's no way any of them would recognize him. Everyone thought that he had been executed in that fake execution, and they had very little contact with him in the first place.

All they might remember is the color of his hair and eyes. After all, because he looked so similar to the previous domain lord, everyone avoided him even after the previous lord had died.

However, even though his appearance has changed so much, Ratoka couldn't tell himself it was "great."

He couldn't abandon parts of his appearance or his name that his mother had given him.

Even if his mother had gone insane. Even if his mother had hurt him.

– The girl's name Ratoka, the long hair that his mother had him keep like a girl's, both of those were proof to him of his mother's love.

Even though his hair used to be dirty and unhealthy, just changing it on him without his permission, and forcing him to use a different name for someone else's convenience, stealing his original name from him, of course Ratoka would feel resentment inside at all of this.

However, he was beginning to understand a little bit that this was all in order for allowing him to live on.

– Nobles are the executors of the law. The previous domain lord that had tortured his citizens was an exception, if there had been a real noble, any lawbreakers would have been the ones punished instead.

Protecting and upholding the law doesn't mean using it to one's own advantage, it applies to everyone, from commoners, to nobles and even the royalty.

That domain lord's daughter, Eliza, must have known that. Even while knowing that, she had gone around the law and allowed Ratoka to live.

He should have been executed according to the law, but even so, Eliza had broken the law and allowed him to live, this is such a serious matter.

What's more, Ratoka had been caught throwing a rock at Eliza, and had even told her he wanted her dead. Breaking the law to keep Ratoka alive, she gains nothing from it, and it could even be detrimental to her.

People like Ratoka that resent the previous lord's only surviving family member, Eliza, aren't rare at all. What if someone else throws a rock just like Ratoka did, is she going to spare them just like him, he wondered.

When he thought about all this, even though he still hates her, he saw a glimpse of a truly heavy burden on her tiny shoulders.

Bellway took Ratoka to the training grounds that he hasn't visited for a long time, and he saw some soldiers he didn't know around the place. They weren't wearing old battered leather armor like the domain's army, but were wearing metal armor instead.

"Bellway-sama, who's this kid……?"

"He's an orphan that's going to become a soldier in training for the Kaldia army starting next spring. He's going to begin learning the spear here. I was worried that he might get lost, so I guided him here."

"I see, but surely Bellway-sama didn't have to go to all the trouble of bringing him here yourself……?"

"Everyone else in the mansion just happened to be busy at the moment. It couldn't be helped."

The soldiers that he didn't recognize came over to talk to Bellway. All these soldiers that Ratoka didn't recognize, and on top of that Bellway was lying to them right in front of him, Ratoka felt something very shady

was going on.

"Since his instructor will be arriving soon, please prepare a section of the training grounds for his usage."

Before he realized it, Bellway had already just about finished talking to the soldiers, and tapped him on the shoulder, causing Ratoka to shrug and turn around, looking at the direction he indicated.

He had seen Gunther and the other soldiers use practice wooden spears before, so he wound some cloth strips around a wooden spear to pass the time, until he heard a cool mature girl's voice saying, "are you Ratorika?"

When he raised his head, he saw a beautiful blonde-haired girl. He's seen her from afar a couple times before, it's Claudia.

"Um..... It's Ratoka."

At Ratoka's response, Claudia nodded to herself in self-satisfaction.

"So it's Ratoka, sorry for getting it wrong. I'm Claudia. Pleased to be in your care."

"I'll be in your care as well."

"Ahh. Then, let's start training immediately. Let's start with twenty laps around the training grounds."

At Claudia's words that she said instantly without hesitation, Ratoka's wooden spear that he was holding slipped from his hands with a noisy clatter.

Twenty laps, that's an amount that even the adult soldiers would have trouble with.

By the way, the most that Ratoka has ever managed up until now has been eight laps. And, she wants twenty?

"Alright, let's start."

Without paying attention to Ratoka's reaction, Claudia was telling Ratoka to hurry up and start running. Even if he takes a light pace, Ratoka felt like twenty laps was still too unreasonable?

Even so, Ratoka went along with Claudia's demand, and ran completely out of energy after fifteen laps and could run or train no more, and his first day of spear training concluded earlier than expected.

Chapter 65: The Same Name (Part 9)

Many days later, although he was feeling fatigued, Ratoka managed to drag his heavy-feeling body to the training grounds again.

On the short path from the mansion to the training grounds, Bellway had greeted Ratoka with a “you’re going?” and hadn’t said anything else.

All the adults at the mansion are like that. They never chat about anything unnecessary. There’s only terribly businesslike brief exchanges, Ratoka felt no warmth from them at all.

Although he had been lonely in Cyril village, his loneliness had begun fading while in the barracks, so now he’s gotten to the point where he can no longer stand being ignored.

Just like yesterday, Bellway left him behind without saying anything, and Ratoka..... sighed heavily.

He wants to meet Elise so badly, and talk to her about anything at all.

There were too many things he was thinking about spinning inside his head, it’s to the point where he can’t organize his thoughts or figure out what to do.

That’s why, he wants to temporarily forget about everything.

Although that was the wish inside his heart, he knew that it was very unlikely to come true. At the very least, he wants to be able to just make some casual conversation, changing his wish to something smaller.

If nothing had changed about his life, his wishes would have never come true before. However, there’s now one more person around Ratoka than there used to be.

Claudia is still a teenager that’s easy to get along with, it might be okay to make some silly idle chatter with her.

When he thought about that, even though he was still tired from yesterday, some energy returned to him.

Ratoka who was trying to console himself a little bit, suddenly looked

around him. That beautiful golden hair was nowhere to be seen in the training grounds.

Well, he'd gotten here a little early. He'll wait patiently, and Ratoka sat down against the wall.

However, after two hours passed, then another half hour, Claudia still never showed up.

Although Ratoka did figure out that something might have happened, Ratoka still stayed there waiting for her by himself, as he had nothing else to do.

In the end, Claudia never showed up to the training grounds. Since Bellway had told him not to make any trouble, Ratoka didn't move from the training grounds. He didn't know what was going on, nor could he do anything about it, all Ratoka could feel was anxiety.

Everything about Ratoka was controlled by the nobles in the mansion, he couldn't do anything by himself. The nobles have also told Ratoka nothing about anything going on.

This is the first time that Ratoka's been confronted with nobody telling him what to do. Feeling anxiety together with a strange sensation, at last Ratoka finally stood up, and headed for the exit of the training grounds.

Another thirty minutes had passed without anyone at all coming for Ratoka. He wants to take a look around to see what was going on with the abnormal situation..... hopefully he won't be scolded.

While furtively walking along the paths, come to think of it, Ratoka realized that Earl Terejia's personal troops that were usually hanging around here weren't anywhere to be seen today.

He felt more and more that something must have happened. Ratoka couldn't help but increase his pace more and more, until he started running.

He opened a door leading to the mansion, then suddenly turned around and flattened himself against the wall, as he heard many people's voices.

It seems that there's a lot of people right now in this part of the mansion. While paying careful attention to his surroundings, Ratoka stuck to the shadows and took the path to Elise's room.

With his back pressed against the wall, Ratoka carefully peeked at the entrance to the mansion. Many of the missing troops from Earl Terejia's army were gathered there. He also saw Bellway and Earl Terejia among them. This is the first time that he's seen Earl Terejia in a long time.

What's going on, Ratoka held his breath as he surreptitiously spied on them. Everyone was looking up at the sky to the east, without any signs that they were going to go anywhere else.

What exactly is going to happen in the sky over there.

Ratoka, in his curiousity, looked at the sky as well. Other than the sunset, there was nothing. Only the reddish color of the sky that Ratoka hates.

It all seemed slightly ridiculous, everyone was staring into the dazzling sunset. Then, finally, a small black speck appeared in the sky.

Ratoka thought that it was a bird of some sort, until it got bigger and bigger as it approached, to the point where he could even see its shadow on the ground. It definitely wasn't a bird, and he looked away from it, back at the group of people when they started making a commotion.

"Look, isn't that Rashiok?"

"……Ahh, that's definitely Rashiok!"

Ratoka tilted his head at what he heard. Rashiok? He seems to recall that name from a bedtime story that his mother used to tell him a long time ago, but can't remember the details.

Ratoka noticed that the people crowded around the entrance to the mansion were pointing at the black speck in the sky.

Then, they must be pointing to that bird. ……No wait, it's not a bird. The black figure, although it spread its wings and was flying through the sky like a bird, it was much, much larger than any bird could be.

That strange shape seems to be heading straight for here. As he kept watching it get closer, he noticed that there seemed to be a person riding on top the bird-like creature.

What exactly is that.

As Ratoka kept staring at the approaching creature out of sheer curiousity, as it kept getting closer and he was able to see it more clearly, he became completely lost for words.

He could gradually make out, what appeared to be Claudia riding on top of the creature. And, he also noticed that Claudia was holding onto someone smaller in her arms.

Her black hair was being illuminated by the evening sun, and wasn't moving in the wind. Her arms were lowered and completely limp, and Ratoka felt himself turning pale reflexively.

She's carrying Eliza. Something must have happened to her at Fort Jugfena, for her to return like that.

The moment he recognized her, Ratoka felt like his heart was being encased in ice. It was as if he was taking an icy shower in winter, his chest was so painful.

She's the girl that he once wished would die. But lately, just what exactly does he think of her.

However, if she dies now, he'll be troubled. Ratoka doesn't belong anywhere – only that girl has a use for him.

Although it's really frustrating for him to admit it, he had to face the facts. It was Eliza that spared his life, not Earl Terejia or anyone else.

As Claudia and Eliza landed on the ground, Ratoka could only watch them while frozen over, with his eyes burning.

Chapter 66: The Same Name (Part 10)

Until the exhausted-seeming Claudia finally transported the apparently unconscious Eliza into the mansion, Ratoka's body remained rooted like a stone.

He was filled with chaotic, confused feelings inside him.

Only when Earl Terejia went inside the mansion as well, did Ratoka awkwardly start moving again.

He doesn't know when Bellway might come looking for him to pick him up. He can't come up with any good excuses, so it's best to avoid being scolded for going off on his own.

He left at a quick pace, and returned to the training grounds.

His heart was still beating painfully quickly. Eliza, Claudia, and the creature they were riding on, were all completely covered in blood. There must have been some sort of battle at Fort Jugfena. Even though everything had been completely normal this morning, he had no clue that any of this would happen.

People that he didn't know, were dying in a place he didn't know, it was still quite a bad shock to Ratoka.

What's more, Eliza has returned, which means that the soldiers that went with her to Fort Jugfena should be returning soon within a few days as well.

At thinking so, he lost all his strength in his shoulders. He tried his best to stand back up properly again, and succeeded right as he saw Bellway entering the training grounds.

"I'm sorry, I forgot about you and left you here for several hours……!"

Bellway who walked briskly up to Ratoka, appeared to be a bit unsettled and impatient. He's so different from his usual terse coldness, that Ratoka went wide-eyed in amazement.

Bellway probably realized his own state as well, he cleared his throat to

calm himself down.

"Since Claudia-sama isn't here right now, I'm terribly sorry that you came all the way out here and waited for nothing. I shall make certain that something like this does not happen again. Then, you can return for today."

Bellway smoothly explained things away, and quickly turned around and left Ratoka, leaving him feeling terribly despondent for some reason. He just wants to hear something about what's going on, an explanation rather than an apology.

The feeling of loneliness was casting a shadow over his heart. Ratoka ploddingly followed along after Bellway in a downcast mood.

Then, some time later, the remaining soldiers from the Kaldia army returned as well, led by Gunther.

Ratoka watched them being thanked in the garden for their service, from a window in the mansion, knowing that he would get scolded if he was discovered. In the garden that was paved with bricks of various different colors, he saw what seemed like shadows on the soldiers' faces, and they barely ate and were quite subdued instead of dancing at the party prepared for their return, drinking alcohol instead.

As expected, with Eliza's situation, they can't just celebrate things.

He wondered if she was injured, she's still shut in her bedroom.

While thinking so, Ratoka stopped looking at all the soldiers, and switched to looking for the people that took care of him in the barracks.

Since Gunther really stood out, he saw him immediately. He was surrounded by a group of soldiers, and even so his rich russet brown hair was rather conspicuous. Something about him seems to be naturally charismatic, attracting others.

For once, Calvin was sitting next to Gunther as well, relaxing.

While the other soldiers had grim expressions, Calvin still had an unruffled, calm expression. Only the soldiers close to him seemed to have

somewhat relieved expressions as well.

Next, he found Paulo and stopped to look at him. He's the shortest among the soldiers, but his fluffy golden hair is really eye-catching.

Ratoka felt relief at seeing his friend healthy, and Ratoka started searching through the soldiers again.

He wondered what happened to Igor. Igor was his roommate, and they got along pretty well, he kept looking for Igor's face among the crowd – and in the end – he couldn't find him.

No matter how much he looked, he couldn't find Igor and his ordinary chestnut-colored hair. He wondered if Igor was injured and was resting in the barracks.

As he kept searching through the soldiers for Igor's location, Ratoka suddenly furrowed his brows, feeling that something was off. What is it. Something seems weird.

……While he kept looking at the soldiers, he realized what it was that he was feeling, and Ratoka felt goosebumps crawling on his skin.

There are obviously fewer soldiers than before.

There's quite a few faces familiar to Ratoka that are missing.

And, there were quite a few injured people down there at the party for them.

Sweat soon covered the palms of his hands. He shuddered out of habit.

They had gone to defend the country's borders. And, their leader Eliza, had returned covered in blood. Meaning, it was probably a battle where people had died.

Why had he thought that the shadows on their faces were related to Eliza's situation.

No wait, just like he surmised earlier, maybe the rest of them were simply in the barracks. The anxiety within Ratoka, swelled and swirled around inside.

He kept looking at the soldiers from the window.

At any rate, none of the people from the mansion are going to tell Ratoka anything about what went on with the soldiers. Then, he just has to go ask them himself.

He has to learn if the soldiers he couldn't see in the garden, were still alive.

Chapter 67: The Same Name (Part 11)

A night one month later, Ratoka softly opened the door to his room.

The hallways were dark as the torches had been extinguished, and the only source of light was the stars shining through the windows.

It was so silent, the even the sound of his own breathing sounded too loud to him.

Ratoka softly sneaked out of his room, and held his breath as much as possibly while carefully proceeding down the dark corridors. Everyone in the mansion was sleeping.

This is the second time that he's sneaked out of his room like this.

The night that the soldiers had returned, Ratoka had also sneaked out of his room to head for the barracks. However, he was unfortunately discovered by Bellway at that time, and he was ordered confined to his room temporarily and given a curfew.

In the end, he hasn't obtained any information, or been able to meet with Elise, all this time.

This time, so as to not be discovered, Ratoka waited until much later at night, when everyone would be asleep, even the servants.

His main goal is to be able to leave the mansion first, and he jumped out of a window on the first floor, rolling onto the ground.

Summer's already ended, and it was quite cold outside. While rubbing his arms to warm himself up, Ratoka hurried along to the barracks.

Unlike the mansion, the barracks had lights lit even at night. Ratoka also knew that someone would be on duty, awake, at all hours. At the southern entrance, there should be a single soldier posted on guard duty for the barracks.

Ratoka really wants to talk to someone and hear what's going on, so that's where he headed.

At the southern entrance, as Ratoka expected, he saw the dim outline of

a soldier standing there illuminated by the candlelight.

Ratoka had been worried that it would be a soldier he didn't recognize, so he felt some relief when he saw who it was. While he was confined for one month, the remaining soldiers that had been helping construct a village for the refugees had probably returned, so the person here might not have recognized Ratoka.

Luckily, the person on guard duty here tonight was someone that had helped with Ratoka's training before. While he wasn't necessarily as close a friend as Paulo and Calvin, he wasn't someone that made fun of or had a bad relationship with Ratoka.

In order to not startle him, Ratoka slowly walked out from the dark night.

"Who's there!"

The soldier immediately drew his sword. Ratoka could see the surprise on the soldier's face in the dim candlelight, and once the soldier saw that it was Ratoka, he sheathed his sword again.

"Ratoka……?"

"Yes, that's right. It's me."

"You, where have you been? ……More importantly than that, why are you here at this time of night……?"

The soldier couldn't hide his confusion, while Ratoka felt the most relief he had in a long time. The only two people that even talk with Ratoka in the mansion are Bellway and Mrs. Marshan, and neither of them show any emotion in front of Ratoka.

At seeing more varied expressions in front of him for the first time in a long while, Ratoka relaxed his shoulders.

"Um, I'm being taken care of at a different place right now. It's been a bit strict, so I couldn't come visit except at this time. Also, everyone at the mansion, they don't tell me anything……"

"Have you come to hear about what happened to us?"

Ratoka nodded, and the soldier scratched his cheek like he was at a loss. Although he had put away his sword, it seems that he's still maintaining a minimum amount of vigilance.

"I saw you all from a distance when you returned. At that time, there were some people I couldn't see..... I was worried if they were injured, and I absolutely had to come find out. My roommate, Igor-san..... is he doing alright? Has he returned?"

So as to not appear too suspicious, Ratoka only asked the minimum of what he wanted to know. However, the soldier paled when he heard Igor's name mentioned.

The candlelight was flickering over the soldier's face that had gone white.

Ratoka clenched his lips and ground his teeth. The soldier's reaction seemed to indicate that he must know what happened to Igor.

For a while, both Ratoka and the soldier remained silent. The fall wind kept blowing on Ratoka. It made him cold, and his shoulders were shivering. The chilliness was a bit too much, and Ratoka was the first one to break the silence by sneezing. Then, the soldier finally seemed to come to his senses.

"Oi, don't catch a cold or something out here. You're wearing such light clothes.....!"

".....I'm alright. Once I return, I have a warm bed I can sleep in. But, before I go back, please at the very least tell me what happened to Igor."

Ratoka looked directly into the soldier's eyes, and the soldier faltered slightly. The soldier bit his lips several times. Then, at last he sighed, and began talking softly.

"Igor, that guy died. He died at Fort Jugfena. He was ambushed from behind and stabbed in the stomach..... Richard, Dominic, Wojciech, Frederick, Joseph, they and more all died. Charlie..... Eliza-sama, seems to have gone funny in the head because Kamil died as well. All she does now is sleep....."

All the names belonged to soldiers that Ratoka knew, and Ratoka felt like blood was draining from his face, and he touched his face with trembling fingers as he was beginning to feel dizzy. The soldier seemed to be quite down as he returned to his guard post at the barracks entrance.

Ratoka couldn't say anything, and just remained frozen there for a while. Although he had known that it was a possibility, being confronted with the knowledge that people he'd known had indeed died was still a big shock to him.

On top of that, hearing that Eliza who controlled his very fate had gone funny in the head, this news made him unsteady on his feet.

He felt terribly dizzy as he tried his best to make his way back to the mansion. The soldier saw him off with an anxious feeling as he watched Ratoka's small back disappear in the darkness with an unsteady gait.

Before he realized it, Ratoka somehow managed to return to his room. His brain felt numb. He was also extremely tired, and Ratoka fell asleep in his bed.

Bellway was shaking him when Ratoka woke up. He was still lost and in a daze. His eyes felt slightly clouded and warm, almost painful. His entire body felt like it didn't want to move, it was heavy.

"Are you alright?"

He heard a cold voice with no worry in it. Ratoka shook his head slowly to clear his mind. He didn't really know if everything was really alright, but for now he has to clear his thoughts first and deny that anything's wrong.

"Is something the matter?"

"……No. Everything's fine."

Ratoka shook his head more strongly than before, and Bellway looked at Ratoka as if trying to pierce through him. It's such a cold gaze, Ratoka involuntarily recoiled.

"……Come to think of it, I guess you're still a child……"

Bellway muttered that to himself. Ratoka didn't hear what he said, and just kept staring at him blankly.

Ratoka met Bellway's eyes again as he was furrowing his eyebrows, and Ratoka hurriedly lowered his face again, and missed seeing an expression on Bellway's face that he's never seen before.

Chapter 68: The Same Name (Part 12)

Ratoka quietly looked down at the girl sleeping in front of him.

Her black hair was scattered on top of the white bedsheets. Her icy gaze and those red eyes resembling the setting sun, he couldn't see right now. Her smooth white skin, was losing its luster.

Even though it's already been a month since she's returned from Fort Jugfena, Eliza has been doing nothing other than sleeping this whole time.

The next night, right after Ratoka learned about Eliza's condition from the soldier that returned from Fort Jugfena, he snuck out again, to Eliza's room. According to what the soldier had said, Eliza was always stuck in this state. Although she wasn't injured, it seems that a guy named Kamil had died at Fort Jugfena, which may have caused an injury to her heart instead.

The fact that Eliza spends most of her time sleeping, Bellway had told him frankly that day. Since he hadn't heard the full story from the soldier, he figured that Bellway probably found out that he met up with the soldiers and probably didn't mind too much.

Eliza also wakes up from time to time. She would open her eyes, and get up, but wouldn't move. What's more, she wouldn't react to anyone voice, and she wouldn't even walk. She won't even make idle chat with anyone. Nor does she seem to react to pain.

Even though she's still alive, Ratoka felt like Eliza might as well have been a living corpse. She doesn't show any emotions, she doesn't talk, nor does she respond to anything.

Maybe, it was her mind that had died, not her body.

And right now, Ratoka just kept looking at Eliza for quite a long while.

Ratoka was holding a silver knife in his right hand. Right now, there's no one by Eliza's side. And, Eliza can't possibly resist in her current state.

His brain still felt numb. He also felt a strange sense of something

resembling elation.

Spending time in the barracks, and spending more time in the mansion again, he's learned many things in this time.

That nobles are not all evil. That the young girl named Eliza, was properly carrying the burden of her father's crimes, as well as her own sins.

That Eliza was trying to allow him to live.

Her way of life, resolution, beliefs, even knowing all these, there was still a reason that Ratoka had a knife in his hand.

The fact that Igor and the others from the army had died, he blamed Eliza.

The reason that they had to deploy to Fort Jugfena, was because Eliza had decided to accept the refugees. Calvin had said that Eliza was the one to aggressively push for Kaldia accepting the refugees.

Even if she's not as arrogant as the nobles he's heard about, she still didn't care enough for the lives under her, and as a result her soldiers died.

He can't forgive her due to his loneliness caused by the soldiers' deaths, and he has nobody else to blame other than Eliza.

Ratoka encouraged the hatred building up within him, and slowly raised his hand holding the knife as well.

If he kills her, this time for sure he'll probably die as well.

There's nobody here that would protect him.

He's scared of dying. But, the words he had spat at Eliza before weren't mere bravado.

He was shaking. His heartbeat was getting faster.

Right now, inside Ratoka, a variety of emotions and memories were furiously flying about and changing places with each other.

His hand holding the knife in the air was trembling. Even though he

had come here without hesitation, he couldn't figure out why he couldn't bring down his weapon.

His mother's face, the rock incident at Cyril village, the dark feelings he had from Igor and the other soldiers' deaths, the things he learned at the mansion, everything was jumbled together in his mind.

"……Urgh!"

His trembling right hand with the knife, he gripped with his also trembling left hand.

Even if he's confused, it's fine. All he has to do is make his hand obey, and swing down like he wants to.

As long as he does that, she'll probably die very quickly.

– But, even after a long time, he still didn't bring down the knife. His hands were only trembling.

He forgot to even breathe, nor could he do anything with his knife, as he watched Eliza continue to sleep, his vision began to get blurry from tears.

He can't keep this state forever, Ratoka thought.

Then, he finally started gasping for breath, and remembered to breathe. He couldn't say anything, all he could do was take deep breaths of fresh air.

Then, at that moment, he suddenly recalled Elise's gentle smile. It was such a sudden bright flash, that it felt like he could really see her before him, as an illusion.

Suddenly, Ratoka collapsed on the floor, like a puppet whose strings had suddenly been cut.

Clang, the knife fell on the floor with a light sound.

His heart is pounding so hard…… it even feels like it's hurting his ears. Even though he's not feeling painful or sad, for some reason he couldn't stop the tears from coming out of him.

Having enough hatred to lead to a murderous intent, Ratoka no longer

possessed that.

"Shit..... Shit.....!!!!"

In his frustration Ratoka tried to punch the floor, then he reached his hand out to Eliza. He grasped the cloth of her high quality nightgown, and shook her.

"Wake up, you..... bastard! You, even though you haven't done anything for the villagers.....!!"

Pitter patter, Ratoka's tears were falling onto Eliza's cheeks. There was no expression on her face, it looked almost like a doll's, a fake toy of some sort.

"Wake up, wake up!!! If you keep sleeping, I, can't even bring myself to hit you.....!!"

Even shouting at her with all his emotions, and shaking her as hard as he could, Ratoka got no response. Ratoka didn't get anything he wanted, all he could do was continue crying and whining.

At his powerlessness and emptiness, he lost even the energy to keep shaking Eliza. He collapsed on her bed, and simply kept crying for as long as his voice held out.

All his invisible anxiety, all his emotions that he wasn't able to organize, his stress, his loneliness, his resentment, everything had reached its limit, he vented all his anger and frustration towards Eliza all at once.

Ratoka, after all, was still a child that wasn't even ten years old yet.

What's more, since his mother had gone insane, he didn't have a proper upbringing, and his emotional development had gotten distorted.

Even though he's older than Eliza, he's much more of a child than she is.

He just kept venting all his mixed feelings by crying, although for how long it lasted, Ratoka didn't know.

But, after he finished crying, he fell asleep on Eliza's bed, just like a

baby.

Eliza, in her foggy state of consciousness, after the crying stopped, reached her hand out to him.

Chapter 69: The Nameless Gravestone

A month of sleeping had definitely decreased Eliza's strength and stamina. Her body didn't move the way she wanted it to, and it felt heavy. Since it's come to this, she actually wanted someone to lend her a hand, but there was nobody that did so.

All she could do was support herself against Rashiok, and proceed almost at a crawl.

And so, she arrived at a small pond close by to the garden. The poisonous hemlock that had killed her family was still growing greenly under the sunlight, and entered Eliza's field of vision. Although there were also bright floral colors to be found here during the summer, right now it's already past mid-autumn, and there were only drab brown and green colors to be seen.

This pond has been minimally affected by humans. Without paying mind to that, Eliza walked around the edges of the pond.

This pond was currently treated as a water reservoir only, and it was created long ago to complement the garden.

It was built even before the mansion existed, from a time long long ago.

That's why, there were still traces of people from long ago left around this pond. The right side of the pond can be seen from the mansion's garden, and various trees' shadows fell across the pond water, and below the trees were some stones here and there. Eliza plopped herself down onto a flat tree stump.

There was a slight sound as the water rippled slightly from the wind which was also swaying the grass, and other than that all Eliza heard was her own heartbeat.

Although the air was chilly, thanks to Rashiok lying down beside her and warming her up, she quickly forgot the coldness in the air.

As she sighed, Eliza stopped to look at a certain location. Her line of sight was directed at the base of a tree, where there was a polished stone

that was a little less than half her height.

It was a gravestone.

Although there was no name engraved on it, nor was there a body actually buried under it, it was still a gravestone.

Eliza reached out and brushed away the dust on the gravestone with her fingers.

Rashiok had carried her to the mansion, leaving Kamil's body behind, and this is the first time that she's come back here to this pond. She hadn't forgotten the person that this gravestone belonged to, it's just that she had gotten tied down by all her emotions and feelings.

"-It's been a while. Sorry for not coming all this time."

Eliza began talking to the gravestone in a small voice. Of course there was no reply. Since gravestones are meant for dead people, she didn't expect any replies.

"……I let an important person to me die. All because of my own foolishness."

Even so, Eliza kept talking to the gravestone, all by herself, alone. Even though her fingers were getting dirty from wiping the gravestone's surface, she didn't care.

"Kamil…… You've become such an important person to me……"

There was only the rustling sound of the autumn wind blowing through leaves in response. The sound echoed everywhere, while Eliza silently thought to herself for a little bit.

"I had always thought that if I trusted people, I would be betrayed and lose my life, but now I know that I can't live life without trusting in people. ……Or maybe, I should say that I felt it would be better to die rather than be betrayed."

After saying that, Eliza fell silent for a moment again. She lowered her gaze to escape the harsh glare of the sunlight.

"……Thanks to all this, I've remembered various things in my dreams

that I've long since forgotten. Even though I have all these memories, just what has all this become……"

She was saying all these words with no force behind them. There was no intonation to her voice, and it was obvious that her voice sounded empty.

Right now, Eliza's heart is still being ruled by her thoughts of the departed. When Eliza had been woken up by Ratoka shaking her that much and shouting in her ears, she had actually been quite pissed, but right now she's actually not that different from when she was asleep.

After losing Kamil, it was like there was a big hole inside her, from which her emotions and feelings had fallen out of.

"……I've slept for quite a long time. I finally woke up because that boy shook me so much. I guess I should call him Elise. Kamil, you'd asked me just what I was doing before, giving him that name so similar to mine, someone he hates so much. It was so that I could create another girl named Elise…… Just exactly what was I doing, I wonder. Rather than something like that, I could have been doing better things……"

Eliza almost sounded like she was whimpering, and fell silent again. She recalled again the crying face of Ratoka when he had woken her up.

Even if someone comforted her, or encouraged her, Eliza's foggy world still wouldn't clear up. Her sleeping all this time, had probably been a form of escape. At the very least, she didn't suffer while she was asleep, she wouldn't feel sadness or guilt or anything else. Even if it was deceiving, it was still a kind of peace.

It was Ratoka's explosion of emotions that had finally dragged Eliza out, forcing her to face reality again.

Although Eliza had thought that Ratoka was pretty smart for his age, it seemed that he's also a bit emotionally underdeveloped for his age as well. Maybe she has to change a little how to deal with him, but she couldn't come up with any ideas currently.

In her previous life, she had no experience in dealing with children

whatsoever, and in this life, she also has nobody her own age as a friend either. She had no understanding of how children's emotions were supposed to develop, and in the first place she herself lacked expressive emotions, so Eliza was completely lost on this.

Eliza looked away from the gravestone, up at the sky.

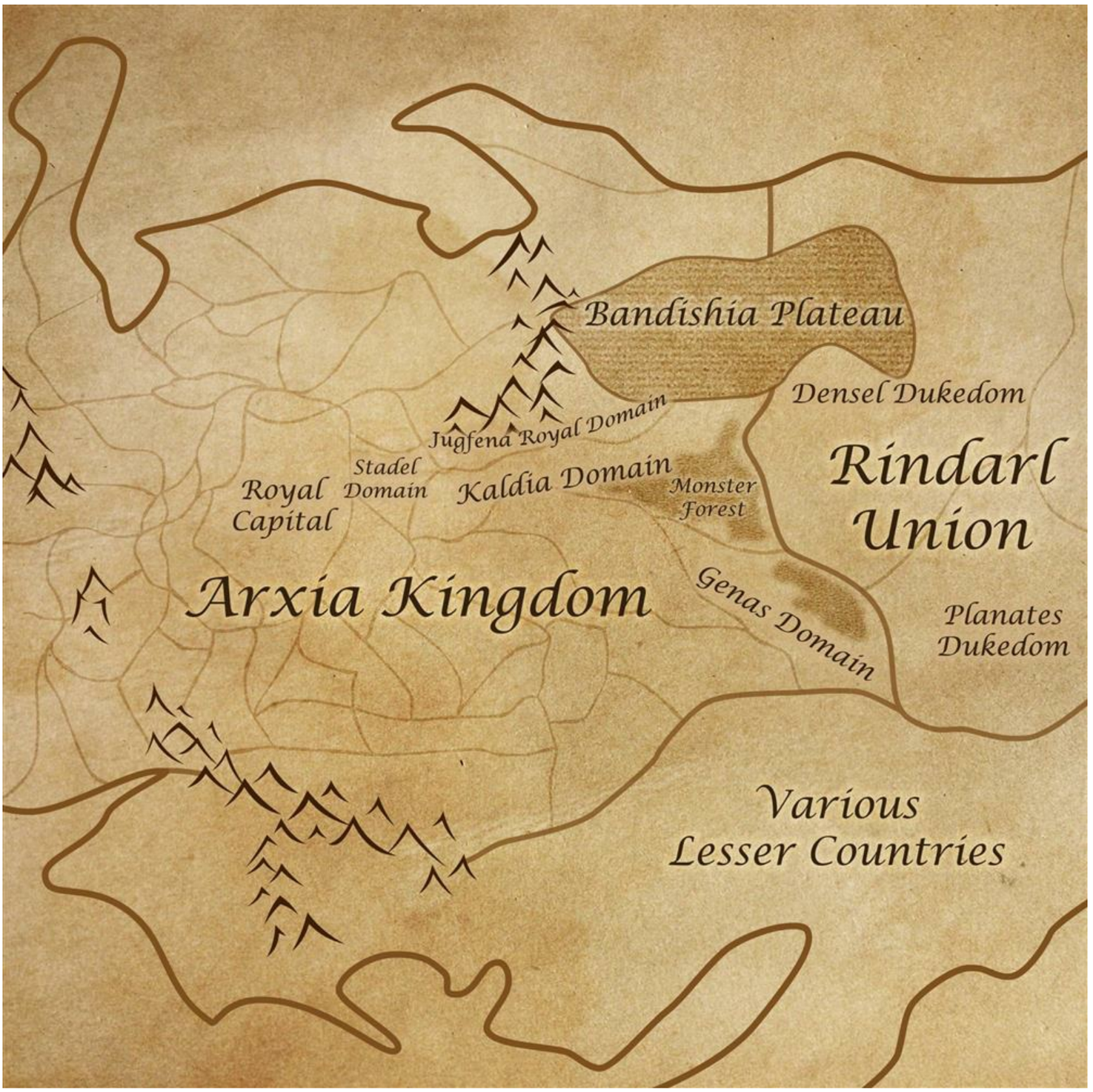
The blue sky hadn't changed at all, whether Kamil was alive, or when he died, it remained the same.

"……Being born into an otome game's world, I had thought that it would be more fun. I reincarnated as a noble girl villainess, but why did it turn out this way?"

While muttering that to herself, she dragged herself over to Rashiok and climbed on his back.

The only creature listening to Eliza's monologue all this time was her draconis, who finally cried, "kuu-on" in return.

Illustrations



Credits

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